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FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1561
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUEAHND/CDRJTFB SOTO CANO HO PRIORITY
RUEAORC/US CUSTOMS AND BORDER WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEPWJF/HQ BICE WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 0132
RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI PRIORITY 0179

UNCLAS TEGUCIGALPA 000575

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STATE FOR WHA/CEN, WHA/PPC, PRM, AND INL/LP
STATE FOR CA/VO, CA/FPP, AND S/CT
STATE FOR DS/DSS/OSAC, DS/DSS/CC, AND DS/CIL
STATE FOR DS/ITA AND DS/IP/WHA

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TAGS: [SMIG](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ETRD](#) [PINS](#) [KCRM](#) [KJUS](#) [ASEC](#) [HO](#)
SUBJECT: HONDURAN IMMIGRATION: THE ZELAYA ADMINISTRATION
TAKES ITS FIRST STEPS TOWARD REFORM

REF. A. 05 Tegucigalpa 1726,

1B. Tegucigalpa 268

11. (SBU) Summary. The Consul General (CG) met on March 6 and 14 with senior officials in the Honduran Immigration Service and they presented a picture of continued confusion and corruption at the Immigration Service. President Zelaya told the Ambassador on March 14 that a new Director of Immigration would soon be named, but did not offer any details about reform plans beyond saying that the immigration function might be moved out of the Ministry of Government and Justice. Minister of Government Jorge Arturo Reina called on the Ambassador, together with the DCM and CG, on 16 March to discuss the Zelaya Administration's plans for immigration reform. The Ambassador told Reina the USG would support a rapid, serious, and transparent program and noted the national security implications for both Honduras and the United States. End summary.

More of the Same . . .

12. (SBU) On March 6, Acting Immigration Director Daniel Ramos gave Reina his letter of resignation. Ramos had discovered that two Immigration employees had entered the Immigration offices on Sunday, March 5, to print passports for members of President Zelaya's family at the request of the MFA. The Immigration employees were Oscar Castro, who is in charge of systems, and Carlos Amilcar Sanchez, the head of International Immigration and, effectively the number two. According to Ramos, neither was authorized to process or print passports, though they had the ability to do so once Castro opened the system. Ramos said this demonstrated the weakness of systems and controls at Immigration.

13. (SBU) On March 14, Immigration official Sanchez called on the CG and acting DHS/ICE representative. Sanchez painted a picture of an agency adrift. He decried the lack of sufficient personnel to do the job and said over-long shifts were exhausting employees and making them more susceptible to mistakes and corruption. He was concerned about systems security and noted that people can enter their databases and

falsify data. He said the personnel structure must be changed and decried the access that document fixers have to clients and immigration officers.

14. (SBU) Sanchez called acting Director Ramos ineffective (thus echoing the views of former Minister of Government Roberto Pacheco). He was unclear whether Ramos's March 6 resignation had been accepted but thought the details of his separation were still being negotiated. Sanchez expected a temporary director, while a commission appointed by the current Minister of Government, Jorge Arturo Reina, examined immigration issues for 45 days. Sanchez does not know who would be on the commission, but had heard Catholic Church Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez would be involved.

15. (SBU) Sanchez is unhappy that the commission is looking at Immigration from the outside and not interviewing insiders. (Comment: This remark highlights the lack of communication within the GOH on immigration issues; the number two at Immigration does not know whether the commission examining his agency yet exists, what its charge might be, or who it will interview. End comment.) Sanchez would favor making Immigration more independent, but would not agree with moving it to the MFA. He believes the Salvadoran model, where the police run immigration, failed. He believes Immigration's problems are too deep-rooted to be solved by just a move in the bureaucracy. For example, he gave Emboffs a list of 28 named Immigration employees he asserts have engaged in corrupt acts.

. . . Or A New Start?

16. (SBU) President Zelaya told the Ambassador on March 14 that there would soon be a new immigration director named and that his government was considering how to restructure Immigration. He said they were considering moving the service out of the Ministry of Government.

17. (SBU) On March 15, MinGov Reina requested a meeting with the Ambassador to outline the GOH's plans to reform Immigration and the meeting took place on March 16. Reina said he would accept Director Ramos's letter of resignation on March 16 and move to name German Francisco Espinal Zuniga (DPOB: 06 August 1951, Naraita, HO) as the new Director. Espinal is favorably known to the Embassy as the former executive director of the National Anti-Corruption Council (CNA), from the days when Cardinal Rodriguez led the CNA.

18. (SBU) Reina will direct Espinal to convene a commission, which must develop a work plan for reform within 60 days from early next week. The report will include internal structural reforms, as well as recommendations as to where in the GOH Immigration should be located. Reina said Immigration may continue to report to his Ministry, be moved to another Ministry, or become an independent entity. The commission will be composed of representatives from the Ministry of Public Security, MFA, CNA, and, perhaps, FONAC, a quasi-governmental body that addresses governance issues. There would be several advisors, including Gautama Fonseca Zuniga (DPOB: 17 August 1932, HO), a respected former Congressman and Minister of Security and two-term Minister of Labor, and Efrain Moncada Silva (DPOB: 14 February 1933, HO), a respected lawyer and former Minister of Government under President Reina and one of the principal drafters of the bill creating the Public Ministry. According to Reina, Cardinal Rodriguez knows of and supports his plan to name a commission. Reina said the commission would be launched with a press conference and that it would keep the public apprised of its progress during its 60-day investigation. (Note: A promise to let the Honduran public know about the workings of a public commission may not seem to be a significant concession to transparency, but it is a significant contrast to the usual practice whereby a group of worthies, and political insiders, gather behind closed doors and then simply announce their conclusions. End note.)

¶9. (SBU) The Ambassador pledged to support reform efforts provided they were rapid, serious, and transparent. He emphasized the importance of transparency in reform of Immigration and noted the problems the GOH's recent decisions on fuel prices had caused because they were made without a chance for public comment on the analysis. He also noted that a failed immigration service poses a national security threat to both Honduras and the United States. The Ambassador asked for, and Reina agreed to provide, an outline of the commission's work plan and goals. Reina noted that the Embassy of Spain has also pledged support.

¶10. (SBU) The CG noted to Reina that a CNA special commission had prepared a January 2006 report on the problems in Immigration and proposing solutions. Reina said that report's proposals might not be the best, but that they would be considered by the new commission. As noted in Ref. B, the January 2006 report was based upon and amplified the Embassy's suggestions to the Maduro Administration.

¶11. Comment: Time will tell whether President Zelaya and Reina's promise to clean up immigration will be backed by effective action. We are encouraged by Reina's promise that the new commission will operate in public, but remain skeptical. A 20 plus year history of using Immigration to make political insiders rich will be difficult to overturn. As the last full-time Director of Immigration said of the service, it is a gold mine for corrupt officials. That said, we will continue to press the GOH to change this dismal history. End Comment.

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